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An organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

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Secretaries: HARRY F. WARD, WINIFRED L. CHAPPELL, CHARLES C. WEBBER

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LABOR

The most crucial convention in the history of the American Federation of Labor has just come to a close. The issue overshadowing all others was determined at a midnight session on November 23 when by a decisive majority the delegates ratified the action of the executive council in suspending ten big unions which refused to withdraw from the Committee for Industrial Organization led by John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers. The newspapers with their accustomed flair for the dramatic have reported much of the current conflict in terms of personal differences between Mr. Lewis and Mr. Green but the issue far transcends the personal. Nor is the question wholly one of the kind of union into which the workers should be organized. In one sense it is the question of whether the great masses of workers should be organized at all. At present they are being sacrificed to the maintenance of the jurisdictional preserves in which the craft unionists are less anxious to operate than they are to keep aggressive organizers from poaching.

TYPES OF UNIONS

The present crisis in labor has developed between the proponents of the two main types of labor organization, the craft and the industrial. The craft unions, sometimes referred to as the "horizontal" seek to organize all the workers of one craft or trade union into one union organization regardless of the industries in which they are engaged. For example, in one locality, where, let us say, automobiles, tires and radios are manufactured and where the craft union set up prevails, the machinists' union would have a local including toolmakers in all three plants, the carpenters' union would include the millwrights in all the plants as well as in the building industry in the locality, and the stationary engineers' union would have members in the power plants of all three factories. If the workers in these same plants were organized in industrial or "vertical" unions, on the other hand, all the workers engaged in any one plant whether skilled or unskilled, tool makers, sweepers, workers on the assembly line, machine operators — all workers in fact excepting those having the power to hire and fire or to set or recommend wage rates — would belong to a local of the same union. The workers in the automobile factory would belong to the United Automobile Workers' Union and those in the tire plant to the United Rubber Workers' Union and those in the radio factory to the United Radio and Electrical Workers' Union. Perhaps the best example of a completely industrial union in this country is the United Mine Workers of America which includes in its membership all workers employed "in or about a mine" whether they be miners actually digging in the shaft, carpenters constructing the shoring, shot firers, hoisting engineers, or stable boys caring for the mine mules.*

*Although we speak of the conflict between craft and industrial unions there are, as a matter of fact, very few purely craft unions remaining. The trend for thirty years has been toward industrial unionism by means of (1) the development of amalgamations of crafts within an industry as in the case of the needle trades unions, and (2) the development of compound craft types such as the International Association of Machinists which includes five types of allied craftsmen in the membership of its lodges. According to Norman J. Ware (Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 'Trade Unions in the U. S.') of 102 national and international unions in the A. F. of L. in 1932, 25 were the pure craft type, 50 were the compound craft type, 25 were amalgamated craft unions operating as industrial units, and the others were industrial unions. The American Federation of Labor is dominated by the craft union point of view.

BASIC DIFFERENCES

The craft union, as Professor E. A. Hoxie has put it, is essentially a "business organization." Men having a common interest based on their trade and their skill organize to promote the good of that particular trade. Their years of training and apprenticeship together with their initiation fees (in some instances as high as a thousand dollars) constitute their business investment. By rigid control over the size of the membership of their union they can create for their organization a monopoly in their stock in trade (skill) and on that basis command prices for it that enable the members to climb into the ranks of the comfortable middle class. On the basis of the past failures with experiments in industrial unionism the American Federation of Labor, composed of a federation of craft unions, was formed in 1886. It might be said that the craft unions maintained their existence in this country because they had a "survival value" in a thoroughly capitalistic society. Their leaders disavowed any "socialistic" purposes and settled down to Samuel Gompers' program of "trade unionism, pure and simple" or the philosophy still more tersely put in the classic phrase, "more now." (In a statement as brief as this necessarily must be it is impossible to make any extended analysis. It is only possible to outline principles in general terms. Any complete and fair appraisal of the Federation would have to include the many instances where the narrow program of "higher wages and shorter hours" was broadened to include effective campaigns for extension of free education, abolition of child labor, workmen's compensation, housing, social security, etc., etc.)

Industrial unions are not so indigenous to the economic system based on profit seeking. Their first aims are still improvement in wages, hours, and conditions of work, but their basis of unity and strength is not, like that of the craft unions, in a common investment in a monopoly of skill but in an identity of interest with their fellow workers as opposed to the interest of the employers. Members of craft unions often find their interest identified with that of the employer more than with their fellow workers, as it is possible for an employer bitterly opposed to unionism to bargain with a small group of organized craftsmen giving them higher wages at the expense of the unskilled who are unorganized. The struggle of the industrial unions is not a struggle for a larger share of the total amount of wages paid but a struggle to make wages a larger share of the total earnings of an industry, even at the expense of profits, and thereby takes on something of the nature of the class struggle. It is no wonder that this appears "radical" not only to the employers but to the conservative leaders of "business unions."

THE STRUCTURE OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

The American Federation of Labor is a voluntary national federation of 109 autonomous national and international unions. Affiliated with the Federation there are also 730 city central bodies, 49 state federations, 522 local department councils (such as building trades councils), the 4 nationally organized departments, and 1254 trade and federal unions chartered directly by the Federation. The actual rank and file membership of organized labor is in the 31,291 local unions throughout the country.

The final authority of the American Federation of Labor is vested in the annual convention which is composed of delegates from the national and international unions elected on a basis of proportional representation with one additional delegate from each department, each city central body, each state federation, and each federal union. In the convention delegates from each national and international union are allowed to cast one vote for each hundred paid up members and all other delegates are allowed one vote each. With this voting arrangement it is easy to see how control is kept in the hands of the men having the craft union point of view as they have one vote for each 100 members where federal unions, which have been the main avenue for industrial organization within the Federation, have only one vote each though there may be thousands of members in the one union.

Between annual conventions the executive council of the Federation, consisting of a president, a secretary, a treasurer, and ten vice presidents, all elected by the convention, becomes the supreme authoritative body. Although these officers may be from any union large or small, the system of representation at the convention strongly favors the election of men who share the craft union philosophy of the large unions.

BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT STRUGGLE

By the turn of the century the modernization of the processes of industry was beginning to challenge the craft structure of the unions within the Federation. With the rationalization of the industrial process and the development of mass production methods the very basis of the crafts was disappearing. Meanwhile the development of capitalism was such that a broad foundation of consumer purchasing power was constantly more necessary to the continuous operation of industry. High wage scales

for the "aristocrats of labor" were no longer guarantees of a high yearly income. In almost every convention of the American Federation of Labor between 1903 and the outbreak of the World War there were introduced resolutions favorable to industrial unionism but Gompers and the administration within the Federation succeeded in defeating them.

These defeats were not only on the basis of the industrial unions conflicting with the structural organization of the craft unions but on the basis of the philosophy of industrial unionism. The A. F. of L. was only four years in existence when at the Detroit convention of 1890 the definite break with the Socialists came about and industrial unionism was associated in the minds of the Federation officials with socialism. No doubt this attitude was encouraged by the fact that it was the Socialists within the Federation who kept pressing the resolutions for industrial unionism. Also the Federation looked askance at this type of organization because its competitors outside the Federation, the I. W. W. and the Western Federation of Miners, were industrial unions and politically radical. The period of the World War accentuated these feelings and the craft union became identified with "Americanism" and attempts at industrial organization were looked upon as "subversive."

The A. F. of L. gave proof of its patriotism by fully supporting the government in war and joining in the red-baiting of the Palmer regime after the war, also it put on the cloak of respectability by association with the National Civic Federation. Nevertheless, it did not succeed in organizing the workers or in gaining recognition by the employers. From the high of 4,078,000 members in 1920 the membership of the A. F. of L. had fallen to 2,890,000 by 1928 and to 2,532,000 by 1932.

It would seem that the leaders of the Federation have not learned that it is not things "unAmerican" the industrialist despises but unionism itself and any movement that threatens to organize the workers will be labelled "unAmerican" no matter how many times "subversive elements" are excoriated at its conventions or its president appears before national conventions of the American Legion appealing for co-operation.

NEW DEAL DRIVE

With the advent of the Recovery Act and with the promise of government protection of the right to organize there was a rapid growth in the membership of the unions. By far the larger portion of this growth came in the unions organized along industrial lines, such as the United Mine Workers and the unions of the needle trades, while Federal unions which offered a way of organizing industrially increased in number between 1932 and 1934 from 307 to 1788. This would seem to indicate that under modern conditions industrial unionism more nearly meets the needs of industrial workers. The issue came before the A. F. of L. convention of 1933 but was referred to a conference of officials. This conference later convened in Washington but while it authorized the Federation to inaugurate an organizing campaign in the mass production industries, nothing came of it. In the 1934 convention, in San Francisco, John L. Lewis succeeded in enlarging the executive council and in getting through a resolution directing the council to issue international charters to organizations of workers in mass production industries, particularly automobiles, rubber, cement, and aluminum, and carrying a mandate to inaugurate a drive for the organization of the workers in the steel industry. This sounded very promising but there were qualifying clauses that protected the jurisdiction of the craft unions and in the year following the executive council seemed much more concerned with carrying out the injunctions of the qualifying clauses than in fulfilling the mandate of the convention to organize the unorganized.

At the Atlantic City convention of 1935 resolutions were offered which aimed at removing the restrictions designed to protect the jurisdictions of the craft unions in the mass production industries by granting unrestricted charters to organizations in these industries allowing them to organize on the same basis as the United Mine Workers or the United Textile Workers. This move was defeated in the convention by a vote (taken as described above) of 18,024 to 10,933. It is on this vote that President Green bases his claim that the formation of any group to organize workers along industrial lines is in defiance of the expressed will of the majority and a threat to the democratic control of the Federation.

THE COMMITTEE FOR INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION

Soon after the close of the 1935 convention it was announced that eight national and international unions had formed a Committee for Industrial Organization (C. I. O.) and were making plans for the inauguration of a drive to organize workers in the mass production industries, particularly steel. The number of unions represented soon increased to ten and later to twelve having a total membership of 1,296,500.

After a heated exchange of letters and telegrams between John L. Lewis and

William Green, the executive council of the Federation met on August 8, 1936, and voted to suspend the unions which were members of the C. I. O. In the suspension order the door was left open for any union which would dissolve its affiliations with the C. I. O. to return to good standing in the Federation. This offer was good until September 5th but by that time no unions involved had signified any intention of deserting. After the vote of the executive council David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, followed the lead of Lewis and resigned as a member of the council.

In the interim between the final action of the executive council in September and the opening of the convention November 16 in Tampa, numerous "peace proposals" were brought forward. Further efforts toward dividing the ranks of the C. I. O. members were also vigorously pushed, aided materially by the handling of the events as reported in the New York *Times*. The executive council appointed a committee to meet with a like committee of conciliation to be appointed by the C. I. O. to discuss ways of restoring harmony within the ranks of labor. Lewis and his associates have stoutly maintained, however, that there can be no purpose in the two committees meeting until what he describes as the unlawful action of the council in suspending the unions is rescinded. So called "peace proposals" should be heavily discounted as skillful manoeuvers on each side to force the opposing side to take action that will put upon it the onus of bringing about the final rupture. Evidence that neither group entertains much hope of a peaceful settlement is found on one side in the drastic action of the convention in outlawing the union label of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and recognizing that of the United Garment Workers, a small union whose members for the most part are engaged in the overall manufacturing industry and on the other side by the acceptance into membership in the C. I. O. two unions over whose workers international unions in the A. F. of L. claim jurisdiction, the United Radio and Electrical Workers and the Shipbuilders, with combined membership of about 60,000.

THE OUTCOME

The convention in Tampa by a vote of 21,679 to 2,043 (the suspended unions, of course, not voting) adopted a resolution supporting the executive council in its action against the C. I. O. and indefinitely continuing the suspension. According to Charles P. Howard, president of the International Typographical Union and secretary of the C. I. O., this action constituted a "usurpation of power" and brings a new element into the controversy. He maintains that if the council assumes the right to suspend international unions the Federation ceases to be a voluntary federation of autonomous unions. "Thus," said Howard, "dictatorial power is placed in the hands of the council; the constitution goes out of the window; and regardless of years of affiliation and investment, every international union is at the mercy of any combination that can control a majority of the executive council. . . . If the policy adopted by the convention remains in effect there will be more international unions leaving the Federation."

If this should result in the setting up of a rival federation the most serious difficulties would arise in the city central bodies and in the state federations, some affiliating with one group and some with the other, with the danger that factionalism will be sharpened by sectionalism. Perhaps, however, the conflict is inevitable.

The significance of the organization of the C. I. O. and its vigorous drive to unionize the workers in the mass production industries is tremendous. Here are unions numerically and financially among the strongest in the Federation, led certainly by the most able leaders the movement has, offering for the first time in the history of the country a direct challenge to the big moguls of American industry. There can be no question about the type of labor organization and labor philosophy that will enlist the sympathy and support of socially minded Christians and organizations like the M. F. S. S. that stand for fundamental social change. The removal of the profit-seeking economy and its replacement by a conscious social economy demand the mass organization of labor conscious of itself as a social force. Industrial unionism with its inclusive structure and democratic organization can become a powerful force both in relation to the immediate needs of labor and the wider process of social change.

Sources: Pamphlets Comm. for Industrial Organization, Washington, D. C.; articles in the *Nation, Survey Graphic, Fortune, Forum, Social Action, Federationist,* Information Service of the Federal Council of Churches and material from the research division of the WPA, New York.

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